Maundy Thursday Homily

April 9, 2009

I've often wondered what it was in that Upper Room.

Not long ago they were together in Galilee, among their own people.

He had called each one of them, looked each of them in the eye, called them by name — Simon Peter, John, Andrew, Judas and said — "Follow me." And each of them, for individual reasons, had left what they were doing and followed him.

They followed him as he walked from village to village, teaching in the Synagogue.

They had stood and listened intently as he taught:

How happy are the poor
How happy are the meek
Happy are the merciful — the peacemakers: they shall be called children of God.

They were there with him at the end of the day when people came to him bringing their sick, their elderly, their children, wanting only the blessing of his touch.

They were with him at mealtime when he welcomed everyone, to their surprise, and consternation and then, great joy, to his table. There was room for everyone in his great heart.

But then, he had announced there that they were going to Jerusalem for the Passover. A few of them objected, giving voice to what they all were thinking. It would be dangerous in Jerusalem. It was the stronghold of his enemies, people who did not like and were threatened by what he was doing and saying. They followed him to Jerusalem reluctantly, walking behind him.

When they approached the city he ordered them to procure a donkey, a colt, and he did something unusual — he rode in through the city gate. Whereupon the Passover crowd of pilgrims from all over the country, including their native Galilee, erupted

in a public demonstration. There were shouts of "Hosanna — Blessed is the One who comes in the name of the Lord." That was how the Messiah, the heir to David's throne, would be welcomed one day. They tore the cloaks from their backs and branches from Palm trees and laid them in his path.

They knew there would be trouble now.

Now it was Thursday night. His enemies had organized: a plot to betray him and have him arrested was underway. He seemed to understand what was happening as he gave them specific instructions about the evening meal, the last evening before the

Passover. It would be their last supper together.

There was none of the normal good natured bantering. Talk was minimal. What was there to say?

Later they would remember how, when they were reclining at the table he washed their feet. They ate in silence and when the meal was over he did something they would never forget.

He took a loaf of bread and broke it in half and said, “This is my body broken for you.” He passed the bread and, in the holy silence, they each broke off a piece and ate. He passed around a cup of wine. “This is my

blood shed." He asked them to remember this night, remember him every time they broke bread and drank wine together.

The very air was heavy with the significance of what was about to happen that night.

He said he had one final instruction, one final commandment for them — "Love one another as I have loved you."

As we, tonight, come to table to eat and drink and remember — it is a time and a world where brokenness is so evident.

Brokenness in the Middle East- Israel-Palestine: brokenness in Iraq and Afghanistan. Brokenness between Jews and Muslims and Christians; between Shia and Sunni, brokenness between North Korea and the rest of the world: brokenness in border cities of Mexico and in neighborhoods of Chicago.

"Love one another," he said. "Love one another as I have loved you."

It seems like such a small thing to be talking about love in a world like ours. And surely that is exactly how they felt that night in the Upper Room as the net tightened, as the soldiers

and crowd with torch and spear approached.

It is what makes this week holy — this Maundy Thursday holy, this communion holy. His love and our love.

It is what makes tomorrow a Good Friday — and quiet Saturday a holy waiting. It is what will bring us back here on Sunday morning, his love — that is stronger than death.

May we remember him, our dear Lord Jesus, his love for them, his great-hearted love for the world, his love for us, his love that will go to the cross.

And may we remember, deeply in our hearts, his simple commandment — that we should love one another as he has loved us.

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Prayer of Thanksgiving - p. 275/6/7.